

The Art of a Nation

Irish Works from the
Allied Irish Banks and
Crawford Art Gallery
Collections

May 13th – 31st 2015
Mall Galleries, London
SW1



Shane Blount, *It's a Blue Giraffe*

The first major exhibition of Irish Art to be held in London for over 30 years will open at the Mall Galleries, The Mall SW1, on 13 May 2015. Entitled *The Art of a Nation*, the selected works celebrate the rich story of Irish art from 1880 to the present day. The exhibition will be opened by Ireland's Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Heather Humphreys TD.

Drawing on Allied Irish Banks' incomparable collection of paintings, photography, tapestry, sculptures and video, this exhibition includes more than 70 works by many of Ireland's greatest artists. Referencing key moments in Ireland's rich history, from the War of Independence to the present day, the works range from 19th century *en plein air* painters such as Aloysius O'Kelly and Sir John Lavery to the Dublin Painters Sean Keating, Jack B. Yeats and Paul Henry. Iconic moments of Irish life are presented in works by Harry Kernoff & Grace Henry.

The exhibition also includes modernist works by Sean Scully and Hughie O'Donoghue, and reflects on the strength and depth of contemporary Irish art through the work of John Gerrard and Caroline McCarthy. The exhibition includes a work by Shane Blount, a 35-year old self-taught artist whose (family) portrait is depicted with gritty realism.

Presented in collaboration with the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and the Crawford Art Gallery, Cork, this exhibition offers a fascinating survey of the national essence of Irish art spanning 125 years.

The Allied Irish Banks collection began in 1980, acquiring works in order to preserve and support this key aspect of Ireland's cultural heritage. From the outset, Allied Irish Banks wished to build a representative collection, including works by Irish artists based at home and abroad and works by foreign artists operating in Ireland. It traces the development of Irish art, beginning with the birth of modernism around 1900.

AIB Chairman, Richard Pym, said "The AIB collection is regarded as one of the finest in Ireland, scrupulously put together over more than three decades. We are delighted that the public in Britain has this opportunity to see the depth of Ireland's culture and heritage".



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Notes:

The works exhibited are selected from the collections held by Allied Irish Banks and the Crawford Art Gallery Cork.

Allied Irish Banks, p.l.c. is 99.8% owned by the State. <http://business.aibgb.co.uk/>
The Crawford Gallery is a public gallery in Cork. www.crawfordartgallery.ie

The last major exhibition of Irish Art in London took place in 1980 when the Arts Council in Ireland mounted three important exhibitions as part of 'A Sense of Ireland, the London Festival of Irish Arts'. These three shows, *Without the Walls*, curated by Dorothy Walker, *The International Connection*, curated by Cyril Barrett, and *The Delighted Eye*, curated by Frances Ruane, gave three different perspectives on Irish art of the 'seventies'.

Editors' Notes

Allied Irish Banks, p.l.c.

Allied Irish Banks, p.l.c. is a financial services group operating predominantly in the Republic of Ireland and the UK. The bank, in which the Irish State has a 99.8% shareholding, provides financial services to personal, business and corporate customers and has a leading market share in banking products in the Republic of Ireland. AIB has been fundamentally restructured in recent years to become a customer-focused, profitable institution supporting Ireland's economic recovery.

Art critic and historian Dr. Francis Ruane was enlisted to help shape Allied Irish Banks art collection (from 1970-2011), which numbers more than 3,000 pieces. In 2012, 39 key pieces from the collection were donated to the State, and are now held by the Crawford Art Gallery. The bank continues to run a major loans scheme to public and private organisations throughout Ireland, making significant artworks available for public exhibition. Works are shown in Irish galleries, colleges and bank properties throughout its branch network.

Mall Galleries

Mall Galleries is a major contemporary gallery space in the heart of Central London, championing the work of new and established artists. For over 40 years Mall Galleries has played a crucial role in diversifying the practice of, primarily, figurative art, exploring its boundaries while promoting, inspiring and educating audiences with new exhibitions and interpretations of the contemporary world.

Mall Galleries is operated by the Federation of British Artists, a major UK visual arts charity established in 1961. The Federation comprises eight of the UK's leading art societies, specialising in oil, portrait, marine, wildlife, watercolour and pastel painting.

The charity has recently completed a significant project to convert an area of 19th century vaulted space into a dedicated Learning Centre, extending the charity's educational resource.

www.mallgalleries.org.uk



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